

Leaving The Internet

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/31316657) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/31316657>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	Gen
Fandom:	Original Work
Additional Tags:	Poetry
Language:	English
Series:	Part 2 of Lampley's Poems
Stats:	Published: 2021-05-15 Words: 5,805 Chapters: 48/48

Leaving The Internet

by [ylzzirf](#)

Summary

Leaving The Internet : Poems by Lampley Miguet

A collection of quasi-related poems. The themes in this collection include social media, family, loss, wounds, the Internet, relationships, memories, pain, kindness, and other stray observations about life.

Social-Ish

My dad mending the fence so my neighbor's Rottweilers don't get out, so that animal control isn't called out, so that CPS isn't called out, is mutual aid.

My parents taking down an outdoor light because it bothered the neighbor's kids is mutual aid.

My dad helping a different neighbor jump-start her car is mutual aid.

My parents helping to ensure the cats in the neighborhood are spayed, so that the neighbors don't get in trouble, is mutual aid.

Cleaning up all the litter on our side of the neighborhood, so that the neighbors don't get in trouble again, is mutual aid.

Leaving out firewood for the other neighbors — even though they voted for a shitty president — is mutual aid.

I can't convince anyone to change their politics, but sometimes I wish I could get people to monitor their own behavior a little more closely.

When this happens, I start monitoring my own behavior a little more closely.

I ask myself what I have to give — and what I'm willing to give.

Social Media

We're all still looking for you —
one of your all-caps status updates,
one of your goofiest selfies,
something coming from you.
But I know it won't come.

These websites are supposed to help us
stay close to our friends,
or get even closer,
but there are some borders
that these sites don't reach,
there are some barriers
that can't be crossed,
some friends who have been left behind.

I keep scrolling, until I see what I want to see —
which still isn't what I was looking for.

Our whole family has a hard time finding what
I've been looking for:
something safe and consistent.

My great-grandfather would take a job —
cutting trees, planting,
anything like that.
Would get so drunk that he couldn't
finish the job,
would send my twelve-year-old grandfather
and ten-year-old great uncle out
into the field to plow,
into the woods to cut big trees,
out onto the river to deliver the lumber to Cairo.

The boys taught my great-grandfather's donkey to only ride double —
and when he tried to get on
by himself,
it would fling him off.

Was it worth it? Was it worth the punishment?

Years later, my grandfather cut his fingertips off
while chopping wood,
but he still managed to pick my father up,

to cradle him in his bloodied arms,
to pack him back home.

“My legs are cold,” my dad whined,
pleading with my grandfather for help.

Helpless, helping —

With a red hand, he covered Dad’s legs and walked him home.

Carrying the weight, always.
Always doing something for someone else,
Always well-liked and respected and
still owed so much.

I think about what it means to give and give and give and give and give and give ...

*I cry until my eyes hurt.
Until I have given back the hard and soft feelings I've been given.*

Temporary

I take out a pen and
start drawing lines on my skin,
following the outline of my psoriasis.

I give myself temporary tattoos,
remembering the fake tattoos
we gave each other back in school.

I remember the girl who came back to school
and told us she got pregnant at church camp,
I remember how I realized some of us were growing up,
I remember realizing that I still wanted to be a kid,
I realize that I still am a kid.

I'm just a kid who likes it when her mother makes refried beans for dinner.
A kid who feels silly because I'm the only one of my friends who doesn't have a pet plant.
A kid who scratches at my skin when it itches and then wonders why it won't heal.

The Spring I Reproduced Asexually

All of this sowing and growing
and all of the changing —
I can't stand to see things
moving on without me.

I make my plans to keep
producing, producing, producing.

Fingers to the keyboard,
hand on a spade —
I can't keep from planning
and planting.

I have to take care of things on my own,
which is hard when you can
barely take care of yourself.

I find a way to water the seed,
to plant the tree,
and to wait —
to wait until things are ripe.

Empty Orchestra

I went to a party in Nashville.
Six famous musicians,
two from the same band.

I was supposed to meet you there,
but you ditched me.
I tried to make small talk
with a guitarist,
tried to think of something to say
even though I don't have any
musical ability,
can't play an instrument,
and don't have much to say about anything.

It was then that I realized
my weakest instrument was my voice.
I can't sing and
I can hardly talk
without having somebody feed me cues.

Maybe I should try karaoke.

Leaving The Internet

This is one of my truest fantasies.

I could walk away, or drive down the road,
and not worry about whether you'd
posted something new.

I can't leave everything behind, I know,
but just let me keep the parts I want to keep —
I'll keep them in my memory,
random-access
but manual.

I can do it —
I can leave the bad stuff in the past.
I can log out, even if I can't
dump my laptop into the ocean.

Maybe I'll do that, too, eventually.

In the meantime,
I will walk away,
go outside,
and pick some wild strawberries.

Picking Lettuce

Out in the garden,
I gather handfuls and
get my hands dirty.

By the time I'm done,
I have enough lettuce for
three big salads.

I think of my grandmother,
her mother,
her mother —
ladies who could plant and pick,
pick and pluck,
pluck and de-bone.

I'm a product of my raise
and a product of my environment.

I speak like an old fashioned woman —
but I worry that it comes across as sarcastic.

Once, I told a group of young women,
“I’d hate for you to have to trouble yourself” —
and it came from a place of sincerity,
but I wonder if it came across that way?

I wonder if my country tongue
sounds terrible and venomous —
if my country tongue betrays me.

People in the South say, “Bless your heart!”
And if you live down here,
you know it means
a great many different things.

Sometimes, it’s judgmental —
judgmental as all get-out.
Other times, it means something more like:
“You’re being naive.”
“You’ve been going through it.”
“You must be new to this mess.”
“You just don’t understand, *do you?*”
“*I sure feel sorry for you.*”

It all depends on context —
but some people think these expressions sound catty,
like something a belle would say.

But I am no belle - that's just how I talk.

I console myself with my basketful of lettuce.

*I'm just a serious woman with
a funny way of talking.*

I come from a place
where people say things like
“madder than a wet hen” and “airish” —
that's how the people talk.
That's how the people
make themselves understood.

I understand where they're coming from,
because that's where I'm coming from:

backyard gardens, pole barns, pecan groves, tobacco fields, bayous, meadows full of weeds
that look like flowers, kudzu-lined hollers, open pastures, dirt roads, thickets, and

any empty place that feels like home.

Tuxedo

Tuxedo.

I love this word.

I imagine there are lots
of other words to be loved
and to use to show my love.

I can imagine a narcissist
with a stray-cat ego,
looking for the feeding —
all dressed up in a new tuxedo.

I remember I had to douse myself
in perfume and cologne
to be able to stand
going to the nursing home.

Dressing up isn't always fun.

A teacher told me I could become a speechwriter,
but I'd rather do things on my own terms.
I'll do things with or without an audience.

What I love most about a tuxedo —
that you can take it off,
send it to the thrift store,
or burn it in the backyard.

Floats

I wish I could have
another one of my grandmother's root beer floats.

My grandmother was the kind of person
who went back to the antique store
to buy a suitcase
I'd noticed in a side window.

I love that suitcase,
even though I use it for storage.

These days, I find myself less tethered
to material things.

I only long for things that don't last forever,
like the last bit of root beer foam
and melted ice cream
clinging to the bottom of
an empty glass.

Mr. Elkins

Mr. Elkins,
parents or grandparents from central Africa,
little else about him known.

A mystery to me,
what he liked to eat,
what he liked to do,
where he wanted to go ...

I've heard that a full DNA sequence
could fill hundreds of books.
This is the overwhelming amount of information
we pass down through generations —
unwittingly, of course.

But I would like to know how Mr. Elkins
passed his time,
talked to his kids,
and whether he enjoyed
what the world had to offer.

I want to know what he thought about
cats, lakes, women, the sky, dogs, books, chores, his neighbors,
the annoying man at the end of the road,
and arrogant people living in his town.

I would like to know that information,
because I would like to know if his
thoughts were anything like my own.

And I want to know if I can
attribute the best parts of myself
to him —
or his mother,
or her mother.

Because I remember that I owe most of my good traits
to an army of unnamed women,
from little villages in Ireland, Congo, Finland,
Scotland, France, Spain, the Maghreb,
and Virginia and Kentucky.

Women of all walks of life —
mothers and women who didn't want to be mothers —
all of whom are embedded in me, too.

I carry the best parts of them with me,
even when I don't know what they were called,
or - more importantly - what they called themselves.

Beth G.

It's just a nickname -
just a name given to her,
just a shorter version
of her proper name.

And who wants to be proper
all of the time?
Live a little!
Cut a few corners
(and a few letters)
when you need to ...

But promise me that
you won't let anyone call you
a thing that you can't tolerate.

I don't want to see your name
on page two of the newspaper.

But to see your name
written in your own hand?
Whatever you want to call yourself,
that's fine by me.

Drinking at The Dragstrip

Superfast down the quarter mile,
guzzling too much gasoline,
feeling too-hot
under the late July sun -

Flooring it,
going faster than ever,
needing to get away from
everything and everyone.

The dragstrip ends
in a barricade,
but the advertisements plastered across it,
they tell me to DRINK UP,
to ENJOY,
and to LOVE LIFE.

I do love life,
I do,
but sometimes,
escapism involves
sitting quietly,
being alone,
drinking nothing but water,
and saying nothing,
other than remarking to the birds,
"Yes, isn't it a lovely day?"

Dark Cloud Over Kentucky

I can't stand watching the neighbors —
I love it when a storm rolls in
and they have to go inside.

*Go inside, just go,
I whisper,
and leave me alone.*

But they were leaving me alone —
it's just that I didn't want to see them.

I know I could close my window,
but I want to enjoy the fresh air.
Yet the rain forces me inside, too —

I decide I can tolerate the coming storm,
as it's my ally in
keeping unpleasant people out of my way.

Sugarloaf Key

I've never been to the Dry Tortugas,
but my dad used to live on Plantation Key.

I never liked that name —
there are far better names.

Boca Chica, the little mouth,
and Sugarloaf,
though I confess to not knowing
what that word means.

Is it a cake?
No, no - it's a brick of refined sugar.
Something that came from a plantation.

Is there anything that isn't colonial?
Sunset, Middle, Duck, No Name, Boot —

Though boots have certainly been used
to stomp people down.

Later on, I learn about the key called
Knockemdown Key,
which strikes a little terror in me,
and makes me reconsider
my vacation plans.

Bandage

On Thanksgiving,
I drove myself home.

I'd fallen at a friend's house,
felt a shooting pain in my ankle,
used that same ankle to
move my foot to
move the gas pedal to
move my car back home.

I wanted to collapse
on my own bed,
to sleep through the agony —
but my mother wanted me
to go to the hospital.

A painful winter.
I went home and suffered through
the painful winter.

Now, it's summertime and
I have a wound on my hand,
a wound that won't close.

I let the wound soak up air,
soak up lotion,
soak up sunscreen.

I lean into the season —
so different from the pain of winter —
and I let this new season
be a temporary bandage.

Come All Ye Faithful

Driving past the church
with the big neon sign,
I think about going to Church's.

I'd rather have Popeyes, though.
Maybe a chicken sandwich,
maybe those spicy shrimp —
maybe just a little thing of mashed potatoes.

So many choices,
so many decisions to make before
we reach the end of the road.

I think I'll have the spicy tenders.

Dump(l)ing Shop

I miss my ex-boyfriend,
the man who wasn't really my boyfriend,
but who was nice to have a meal with.

It was lovely to have a meal with someone
who appreciated my strangeness,
even if he didn't understand it.

I order takeout for two
and I unpack it at home,
sit outdoors,
and dream of all the people who
I hope to share dumplings with
again, someday.

Neon Sigh

It feels like we're out in the desert,
somewhere vast and empty and
full of a whole lot of nothing.

A big neon sign flanks the desert,
a big neon sigh leaves my lips,
painted the same color as a
moon cactus flower.

Baby Cow

We're driving by a field —
a pasture, I guess —
though that doesn't really matter.

The grass wasn't the main attraction.
The tree growing in the distance was
just a distraction.
The only thing in the field that seemed
new and bright and remarkable
was the calf standing in front of its
exhausted-looking mother.

Spalding

Two or three games a night —
the beginning of the playoffs.
Always something —
a make, a miss, a brawl in the stands —
always something
to keep the mind busy.

When I'm watching a game,
I don't have to worry about my grandmother
or my parents or my neighbor or my job or my pets
or the turtle on the side of the highway.

Something about the hardwood court —
its lines and its clear boundaries —
will always seem safer than
the hospital room,
the dark road,
or the empty cul-de-sac.

A Full-Body Itch

It starts on my palm,
this itch that can't be scratched.

The bottoms of my feet,
the spaces between my toes,
the spot between my eyes —
I'm chasing it with my hands,
but I can't catch up to it.

I sit there,
tingling in silence,
letting the itch
bond with my body.

Ice Cream Machine

We all scream.

We all look for a temporary solution
to self-soothe,
particularly when our problems are unsolvable.

I don't have all the answers,
but sometimes I have enough money
to buy a single-scoop of ice cream.

And the TV and the computer and the cell phone —
only the ice cream machine is incapable of
delivering bad news.

4,834 Steps

Climbing a mountain —
or maybe a small hill.

A small hill is what I'm
most capable of scaling,
most interested in getting over.

And, in time, climbing the small hills
gets me closer to where I want to be,
and is roughly the same,
distance-wise, as climbing the summit of
some bigger obstacle.

Meet Me at The Mall of Memphis

Somebody decided it wasn't safe anymore.
Someone tore it down,
left a bunch of scattered bricks,
the debris of memory,
detritus made up of everything
that people didn't want.

You can't take it with you —
that's something I've heard all my life.

Today, I'll put another memory in my pocket.
I can't take it all with me,
and I can't hang on to it forever,
but let me collect what I can
while I can still hold it.

Institutionalized

Two of my cousins are college professors,
two of my cousins are in the penitentiary —
not the jail, no,
I mean the real penitentiary.

It wasn't for killing anybody, of course.
It was for drugs, of course.
At least they can't be accused of
being too violent.

The colleges are real, too, by the way,
but neither cousin has a doctorate.
An MFA and a JD, if I remember right.
At least they can't be accused of
only being familiar with the ivory tower.

The ivory tower, the watch tower —
it all looms large.

I'm ashamed that I haven't been to visit —
the prisons or the colleges —
but I'm afraid that I'll start crying,
which is a ridiculous reason for not doing something.

Still, someday, I'll be able to get over
my own prejudices and my own fears
and get back to loving my family,
publicly,
with bias,
but without shame.

Reunion

All that talent.
It was all gone, justlikethat.

He was like a firecracker —
it was beautiful,
magical,
and I could feel it in my teeth.
But it was over so quickly.
Over forever.

Sure, it was a sight to see,
if you were there to see it.

And since I can't forget it,
I'll carry it in my memory —
I can meet with it in my mind,
a brief reunion,
until even that fades away.

Uneven Pavement

Scar over tattoo,
big potholes on the old road,
ache on top of ache.

Peach Juice

I'd rather have a glass of juice
than a glass of whiskey.

Maybe it's my state of mind,
my personality —

But how can I be picky,
how can I?
Not when I'm the same woman
who ran out of bread the other day,
who had to pick mold
off of the old loaf that
we kept on top of the fridge.

Still, the juice of the peach
is so sweet and clean —
and I need something clean,
I need something sweet,
and I want something
that I don't have on hand.

Crème Fraîche

A troop of pacifists
perch atop a snow-covered mountain.

A dollop here, a dollop there,
a little of this to improve a lot of that.

I can follow a recipe,
as I often do,
but I can't seem to figure out
what this last bit means.

I can't figure out what it's asking me to do.
Trial and error in the kitchen,
in the office, in the bedroom,
in the classroom, in the driveway,
everywhere I go,
everywhere I make something,
and everywhere I make something up.

Archive

The judge is presiding, yes,
so it's time for the opening statements.

Let me open my files —
I have thousands of records,
thousands of images
and notes and spreadsheets.
All of the evidence is in my archive.

It isn't organized, no,
but it's here.
The thing that you're looking for,
I have it,
but you'll have to give me enough time
to pull it out of the pile.

Tortilla Novelty Blanket

I found it online
and bought it as soon as
I realized I could.

A gift to myself,
an adorable blanket,
very kitsch —
just like me.

I sit down, laptop open,
switching between tabs.
Online shopping, news,
social media, and
a blank screen.

Trying to write,
to write something honest,
where every word counts,
which is why I hate
your four-hundred page book
with lots of pointless filler.

Give me the clearest,
most honest version of events.
I need the direct version,
because I can't stand any bullshit.

I mean, I cannot even stand to use
the bathroom at work
because I don't need people realizing
my shit stinks, too,
and that I'm just
as human as they are.

Observation

Let's be here together,
here in the here-and-now,
here with our flaws —
though we still do
our best for each other.

I'm not here to
romanticize,
proselytize,
or analyze.

I just want to enjoy the moment
stretching before us,
appreciate it for what it is.

Like us, it has flaws —
too fleeting, too hot, too loud,
too itchy, too humid —

But the moment presented itself to us
without a hint of embarrassment —
and thus deserves to be cherished.

Case Study #1

"We'll start at the beginning. Try to remember the memories that left the biggest impression on you."

Growing up, I often had to find ways to entertain myself. I'd go outside and pull up little trees — sprouts the size of garden weeds — and called myself a lumberjack. Doing a big job with small things made me feel important. I also spent quite a bit of time making clover chains. When I made them at my grandmother's house, we would hang them up in her back room. They smelled lovely and looked so quaint, so pastoral, at home with the outside world.

The outdoors was my domain — that's where I was most myself.

I spent quite a lot of time playing outdoors, either by myself or with neighborhood kids. Once, I went over to a friend's house. We decided to play outside, wandering around the backyard. We picked some plums off their tree and, without washing them, ate dozens. Or bit into dozens, as the case may be. We thought it would make a nice mid-afternoon snack. By the evening, though, we'd both become sick. I didn't eat plums for years after that.

Now, when I think of plums, I think of the famous poem first. I only think of our mishap afterward. The plums weren't the problem. Our over-eagerness — jumping in feet-first — had made us gluttonous. So I can't blame the plums. I can only blame my eyes, my stomach, my craving for something so-close-but-still-unknown.

Case Study #2

My dad enlisted me in taking care of our garden because I had such a fervor for being outside. My hands were always covered in dirt. I was always picking flowers, or weeds, or ornamental grass. I would even pull flowers from the redbud trees, staining my hands purple. There was always something beautiful to grab hold of.

In the garden, there were lots of daisies. Big, yellow petals. Lots of marigolds, too. The whole garden was various shades of red, orange, and gold. Part of tending the golden garden involved getting rid of the slugs. Dad paid me a nickel for each slug I moved out of the flowerbed. By the end of the season, I'd helped save our flowers. I'd forgotten about the slugs until many years later — when I realized it had been years since I'd seen a slug in real life. I'd almost forgotten about the slime.

In elementary school, I once bled all over myself — and all over the desk — which was more scary than embarrassing. It was scary because I nearly bled out. My mother left work and took me straight to the gynecologist. Yes, my first visit to the gynecologist was at age ten, which completely threw me for a loop. It felt a bit odd to sit there, to hear how my hemoglobin levels had dropped, and then to feel faint, and then to realize how this would be my new normal, every month until menopause.

Another thing I didn't have control over. Where I went to school, what I had to study, what we had for dinner, and where we went on vacation.

One year, during my fall break, we drove to south-central Florida. We drove around the town my dad used to live in. We stopped at his old middle school, walked around the campus, took some pictures, and then drove over to his old neighborhood. When he divorced his first wife — my siblings' mother — she was given custody of the trailer in Florida. It's old and tiny, but it's not underwater. Yet.

I'm glad she got to keep it, though. Her parents often wintered there, from what I heard. Actually, I didn't hear about it — I read about it in the grandfather's obituary. He seemed like a good man, full of appreciation for family, for friends, and for vacations — the last of which being something I might not have remembered to mention at the end of it all.

Case Study #3

My best friend and I went to a music festival. The day we came back home, I had to drop my stuff off at my house and then hurry over to my part-time job. I worked the evening shift, so I had to stay at work until well-past dinnertime. Before the end of the night, I had to lie down on the floor, flat on my back. I thought it was simple exhaustion. It wasn't — it was a bad case of strep. It was so severe that it triggered a psoriasis outbreak. Every outbreak is a reminder of the first.

At least I made other good memories that week. I have other things to think of, to help myself forget.

That same year, or thereabouts, I had to drive a coworker home. This was because it was an extremely icy evening. I was only 19, but my coworker was even younger. She was nervous about driving on ice. I said that I was more confident about driving on ice than I really was, but I didn't want to let anyone down or to scare my coworkers. Things turned out pretty smoothly — until we reached a busy intersection. I turned left and slid gently past the other cars, right into the far lane. It wasn't intentional, but once I landed safely, I proceeded as if everything I'd done was done intentionally. We arrived safely at her destination. And, later, I arrived safely at home. It was such a small thing, but I felt braver for having done something I was afraid of — something that still could have gone wrong, but didn't.

Small miracles happen every day.

Case Study #4

Fear — I've seen it and I've felt it.

At our workplace, we had a regular visitor who was homeless. He was, like many people, a bit eccentric. But many people — even the more eccentric ones — were afraid of him. They saw that he slept in creeks and in storage units, so they were suspicious of his behavior. He was always unfailingly kind to me, even if he was eccentric or agitated or alienated. I felt like we owed him a bit more compassion. The kind of compassion people show to stray dogs, malnourished horses, and wilting gardens — genuine compassion. Compassion without fear.

Back during my college years, I visited a bison park. I did this because I had to film a video for a school project. After pulling into the parking lot, I stopped to look at my camera equipment. I looked up when a white Escalade pulled up alongside me. A bunch of men in their thirties rolled down their windows and offered to pay for my ticket, to pay for me to go through the park with them. I declined. I was afraid I would “owe” them something in return. I didn’t like that.

But, in being a woman traveling alone through life, I learned to exercise great caution.

Case Study #5

What we remember and what we forget — things that are so interesting to think about.

I walked through the grocery store one evening, wondering which song was playing. I couldn't figure it out, but it sounded too familiar. A Wings song - "Letting Go" - a song which wasn't the sort of thing I'd expected to hear in a grocery store. Our part of the state is full of interesting people, and interesting sights, and all sorts of interesting things. But the song seemed divorced from its sultrier tones, being played under the too-bright lights of a nearly-empty supermarket in rural Kentucky.

It often felt like we were in an unaccounted for corner of the world. And I always wanted to see more. I don't know if I wanted to do more, but I wanted to see more.

Once, when I was home alone as a young adult, I had an entire weekend to myself. I didn't do anything wild; I didn't feel any pressure to do anything except pamper myself. That year, that summer, I spent a lot of time watching international movies. I mostly watched movies from India and Hong Kong. So many Bollywood movies and Wong Kar Wai films - I was obsessed with Kuch Kuch Hota Hai and Chungking Express. That weekend, I watched a few Bollywood movies and treated myself to an acai-flavored cola, which seemed novel at the time. It tasted a bit like blueberry-flavored tea. I can remember the taste, but I haven't had one since that weekend.

That same weekend, though, I remember having an important task to take care of: I had to visit the florist to find an arrangement for my grandmother's stepbrother's funeral. He was such a nice man - he even reintroduced himself to us at my grandmother's funeral. Even then, he was losing his memory. But we wouldn't have forgotten a man who was so sweet, so careful. So constant.

Case Study #6

One afternoon, while I was sitting at work, I had a vague intrusive thought. “It’s been awhile since you’ve thrown up,” the voice said. “Throw up.”

I have to pause here and say that I’ve never struggled with bulimia — never, ever. This is something I consider a blessing, to not be hurting in that way. But I do have a ... not a phobia, per se, but a general unpleasant feeling around the act vomiting. Just thinking about it made me feel that I’d done it.

I reminded myself that, at some point during the pandemic, I remembered eating too quickly, remembered bile rising in my throat, and I told the intrusive voice, “Yes, that does count as throwing up. I’ve done it before and, as unpleasant as it was, it’s just something that happens.”

Around two hours later, I witnessed a car accident. The person slammed on their breaks, launched off the road, and skidded up an embankment. They stopped their car. I watched, cautiously, and then drove away when I realized they probably hadn’t died. Or maimed anyone else.

I spent the next half-hour driving home, stunned, and a little mystified. The car had skidded right past me, tires squealing for hundreds of feet, but it sailed past me. I didn’t get hit. I escaped with my life.

I panicked, of course, as soon as I parked in my own driveway. I felt more dazed than I’d expected. And then I started to wonder if the intrusive thought was a premonition.

“It’s just something that happens.”

But everything turned out just fine. Fine, fine — all around, just fine.

Case Study #7

I picked twenty-eight four-leaf clovers last week. And I didn't worry about writing anything.

It was a young and artless season in my life. And I was grateful.

Paddle Shifters

Let's shift gears for a minute,
only if that's okay.

I like to manipulate my environment,
but only when I can control the situation —
not to put other people at a disadvantage, no,
but to protect myself.

I'm constantly making adjustments so that
I can protect me.

Constantly shifting between fifth and sixth,
moving fast, moving
away from this —
because I can.

Crystals For Beginners

Blood pressure medicine —
I'm always reminding my dad
that it's time to take
the blood pressure medicine.

He has a reminder set on his phone —
and he knows how to use his phone,
a blessing for a boomer —
though of course it helps to have a real person
take the time to remind you.

I think a lot about medicine and healing.
I wonder if I should buy some crystals.
But where will I put them?

On a shelf in the medicine cabinet, I think.
I'll remember that they're there,
and take them down
and hold them — absorbing their energy —
every night,
come seven o'clock,
just like the website ordered.

Artificial Mama

The little gray cat
wants someone to hold him —

But it doesn't even have to be
a person.
He'll cozy up to a pillow, a backpack, or
the arm of a couch.

He'll wrap himself in the embrace of
an artificial mama.

My ancestors would love
even my pimples, I know,
but in my head and my heart,
I try not to idolize them.

Not every single one of them
would want to mother me,
would want to tell me I'm always right.

Let me rest now, they would say.
And they would be right.

Let her rest. Wrap yourself in a blanket and
let Mama rest.

Trial of The Century

Dignified anger —
absolutely, absolutely,
and I agree with you.
Completely.

Not guilty, not guilty, not guilty —
a foreign concept to
the one who feels guilt for
the crimes committed by others.

Looking For Mr. Goodbody

Finnish men are having heart attacks everyday.
I think about this while looking
at one of my cousin's smiling faces.
A black-and-white picture of someone
who hasn't seen the future.

How the happy Finns are predisposed to
facing certain health problems —
and how happiness is still attainable
even in the face of fear.

I spend about a month trying to learn Finnish,
before realizing that almost all
of my cousins speak a bit of English.

Surely, they understand my thoughts —
and my fears.
So maybe I should try a little harder
to understand where they're coming from.

Gag

When I reminded you that
only female mosquitoes bite into our flesh,
seeking nourishment —

when I remind you that these creatures
have killed billions,
you turn to me and say,
“What a bunch of bitches, then.”

I can't stand your sense of humor,
but the bugs think you taste excellent.

Summer Intern

A forger,
a fraud,
an advantage-taker.

All the qualities observed in a flawed person,
a person with remarkable talent
but predisposed to doing
the wrong thing at the wrong time.

But you can still learn —
you still have time to change your ways.

Thank you for spending this magical summer
with our corporation —
though there were only two of us on the staff,
your contributions will be cherished and
much-discussed.

On Losing The Pulitzer

I don't care if the entire board gets bored —
I don't care if they hate my work,
so long as you look upon it tenderly,
or even scornfully.

In truth, I just want you to read my words,
to know me literally
even if we will never know each other biblically,
or in real life, for that matter.

Long Happy Hello

I'm no good with good-byes —
and I'm terrible with hellos.

I often fantasize about accidentally
running into you in the parking lot —
not with my car, of course.

I walk up, see you one row over,
wave casually, and you —
you save me by
saying hello first.
And we fall back into
our comfortable old friendship.

I wish it could be that easy —
maybe someday we'll be granted that opportunity.

And if the roles are reversed,
I promise I'll say hello first.

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